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N°. XXIII.

Observations and Conjectures concerning certain Articles which were taken out of an ancient Tumulus, or Grave, at Cincinnati, in the County of Hamilton, and Territory of the United-States, North-West of the River Ohio: in a letter from BENJAMIN SMITH BARTON, M. D. to the Reverend JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, L L. D. F. R. S. &c.

Philadelphia, May 16th, 1796.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

Read May 20, 1796. **A**S you expressed a desire to see my observations and conjectures concerning the articles which were lately presented to the Philosophical Society, through my hands, by Colonel Winthrop Sargent, I take the liberty of troubling you with them, and shall think myself fortunate if they contribute any thing to your information, or amusement. I need not tell you, that you will sometimes find me leaving the sure road of historical inquiry, for the narrow, and too often uncertain, path of the antiquary. In most of the investigations and researches of the antiquary, some uncertainty is necessarily involved. The light which serves to conduct him is frequently extremely faint: the imagination and conjecture are, therefore, naturally called in to his aid. If this be ever allowable, it is especially so in an inquiry, such as the present, where the subjects of investigation have been taken from the darkness of the GRAVE.

For the account of the discovery of the articles, concerning which I am about to offer my opinion, I refer you to Colonel Sargent's letter to me, which has been read before the Philosophical Society, and which you

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will receive, along with my observations. I proceed, therefore, to the immediate business of my communication.

I propose, in the first place, to inquire by what people these articles were made; and, secondly, for what purposes they were intended.

FIRST.

FROM the obvious antiquity of the tumulus in which they were found; from their general fabric, or appearance, and from the materials out of which some of them are formed, it must, at first sight, seem very improbable, that these articles are the work of any people in the state of society and improvement of the Indian or savage nations of North-America, that are now known to us. These nations, although they are not, as has been asserted, "the veriest ruins of mankind,"* and although in the range of human improvement, and of human glory, they actually rank higher than many of the ancient and modern nations of the old-world, it must still be confessed, are in a very humble stage of society: humble, at least, when contrasted with the point of improvement in manners, in arts, and in sciences, to which many nations have attained. But are there no proofs that the rude nations of America have fallen from a more respectable form of society than that in which we now contemplate them? It appears to me that there are. These proofs are even numerous. Some of them are monuments whose magnitude or materials shall secure to them

* "Mr. Hooker says, they are the veriest ruins of mankind upon the face of the earth." See Governor Hutchinson's History of Massachusetts, Vol. I. p. 414. Salem: 1795.

an existence, when the nations by whose ancestors they were constructed shall have passed away.

In the following inquiry, I shall offer some of my reasons for believing that there formerly existed in many parts of North-America, a race of people, who, whilst they were more numerous, had made much greater advances in the arts, and in improvement, than the present races of Indians, *or than their ancestors since our actual acquaintance with them.* This mode of investigation cannot be said to be foreign to my subject, since it is my opinion that the artificial tumular articles are the work of some of the ancient and more improved people to whom I allude. Besides, by pursuing the inquiry in this manner, I shall render my letter more worthy of your notice, and of the notice of our Philosophical Society, to whom I wish you to present it.

The Aztecas, or Mexicans, in the progress of their migration from the northern country of Aztlan, to the vale in which they afterwards founded the capital of their empire, discovered many and extensive ruins. These ruins were supposed, by the Mexicans, to be vestiges of the Toltecas, a numerous and powerful people, who had made greater advances in the arts of life, and in one of the sublimest of sciences,* than any of the other nations of the new-world. The Toltecas are said to have begun their emigration towards the close of the sixth or the beginning of the seventh century of the Christian æra.† The Mexicans began their departure about the middle of the twelfth century.‡ If these accounts, therefore, can be depended upon, it would appear that the works discovered by the Mexicans had been constructed sometime

* Astronomy.

† About the year 596, according to Clavigero.

‡ According to Clavigero, in the year 1160. Dr. Robertson says, it was "towards the commencement of the thirteenth century." The History of America, Vol. III. p. 156. London: 1796.

between the beginning of the seventh and the middle of the twelfth century.

Whatever credit may be due to this traditional account concerning the Toltecas; whether they were the ancestors of the Peruvians, as I have sometimes been induced to believe;* whether they were an aboriginal or foreign colony whose progeny excites no more, or whether the whole is a tale that has no foundation in truth, I shall not pause to inquire. Whatever may be the fate of these speculations concerning the Toltecas, I think no person that has minutely attended to the numerous vestiges which are daily discovered in various parts of North-America, will hesitate to believe, that there has been a period when a great part of this continent was inhabited by nations who were more numerous than the present races of Indians, and who had attained to a considerable degree of improvement in the arts.

The vestiges to which I allude are of various kinds. They are principally, however, mounds of earth of different forms and sizes; some of them, undoubtedly, depositories of human bones; whilst others appear to have been constructed as the bases of temples, that were erected during the extensive reign of an hideous superstition in America. Others, again, and these are the principal,

* The empire of the Toltecas is said to have terminated about the year 1052. The Spaniards first arrived in Peru in the year 1526, at which time Huana Capac was the reigning monarch of the country. According to the Peruvian story, Huana was the twelfth monarch, in succession, from Manco Capac, who is said to have founded the Empire about four hundred years before. This period will carry us back to within less than one hundred years of the end of the Toltecan empire. My account of the Toltecas is taken from the Abbé Saverio Clavigero's *History of Mexico*, one of the most valuable works that has ever been published on the subject of America. *The History of Mexico, collected from Spanish and Mexican Historians*, &c. translated from the original Italian by Charles Cullen, Esq. Vol. I. p. 83, 84, 85, 88, and 89. London: 1787. It is rather remarkable that Acosta makes no mention of the Toltecas.

appear to have been intended as fortifications, or the walls of large towns.

These remains are scattered over an immense extent of territory in North-America. They are, however, less numerous in what I call the eastern-district of this continent: I mean that district which, is included between the great ranges of our mountains and the Eastern or Atlantic Ocean. It is not difficult to explain the cause of this difference. In the western-district, or the tract of country between the Alleghaney-mountains and the Mississippi, and from this river to the Pacific-Ocean, the most polished nations of America, north of Mexico, resided.* All the eastern nations appear to have migrated from the west, from the north-west, or from the south-west.† This seems to me to be a fact, prominent and well established in the history of the aboriginal Americans. It is particularly established by the circumstances of the greater population and the superior polish of the western nations, when they were first discovered; by the uniform traditional accounts of all the eastern nations; and by the actual march of many Indian tribes, who now occupy, or who within the last two hundred years, did occupy, some of the countries east of the Alleghaney-mountains.

It has been a much agitated question, in this country, by what people the vestiges which I am considering were constructed? Nor has the question remained unnoticed

* The earthen fortifications are very numerous in that extensive tract of country which is bounded by the Mississippi on the east, by the Missouri on the north, by a range of mountains on the west, and by the White-River on the south.

† I do not except from this observation the Esquimaux, who in the opinion of Dr. Robertson, were emigrants from the north of Europe. *History of America*, Vol. II. p. 40, 41, and 42. Professor Blumenbach has well denominated this notion of the eloquent historian "paradoxa opinio." *De Generis Humani varietate nativa*, p. 318, nota. Gottingæ, 1795. *Paradoxæ opiniones* are very numerous in Dr. Robertson's celebrated *History of America*.

in Europe. Some have supposed, that they were erected by the army of Fernando De Soto, before the middle of the sixteenth century.* But this opinion was hardly worthy of a serious consideration. By some they have been attributed to the Welsh, and by some to the Mexicans;† whilst by others, again, they have been considered as proofs of the existence of extensive *civilized* nations in America, at some very remote period of time.‡

It is now about ten years since I first turned my attention to the subject of the American monuments, and since I began to collect materials for a work which is intended to involve the physical and moral history of the aboriginal Americans.§ In this work, the favourite ob-

* See *The American Magazine*, for December 1787, p. 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19. Also the same for January, 1788, p. 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, and 93. for February, 1788, p. 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, and 156.

† The conjecture which I formerly offered to the public concerning the original of these American monuments, I think it necessary to explain with more perspicuity, because it has evidently been misrepresented. My hypothesis was briefly this, that the fortifications, and other artificial eminences in America, were constructed by the Toltecas, or some other American nation, and that the Danes were the ancestors of that nation. I had also imagined that the Danes had contributed to the peopling of America. See *Observations on some Parts of Natural History: to which is prefixed an Account of several remarkable vestiges of an ancient date, which have been discovered in different parts of North-America*. Part first, p. 65. But I did not imagine, or assert, that this continent "was peopled from the north of Europe, probably by the Danes." See *the Critical Review*, for October, 1787, p. 260, and 261. On the contrary, in another place, I had mentioned it as a supposition more than probable, that America "has been peopled from a thousand sources;" see *Observations, &c.* p. 4, and had even hinted that the Iroquois came off from the north-east parts of Asia. *Ibid.* p. 66.

‡ This seems to be the opinion of Dr. Dunbar of Aberdeen. See his *Essays on the History of Mankind in rude and cultivated ages*, p. 193. London: 1781.

§ My friends, if not the public at large, have often inquired concerning this work. I have never hesitated to assign the true reasons for its delay. Tied down, by the necessities of life, to the practice of an anxious and an arduous profession; depending upon this profession for my daily bread and subsistence, it is obvious that I am not in possession of that leisure and of that

ject of my earlier and my present days, I hope I shall be able to demonstrate the physical antiquity of America; the remoteness of its population;* the countries from which it was peopled; and the fewness of its radical languages. I trust, I shall also be able to vindicate, from the aspersions of certain popular and eloquent writers,† the intellectual character of the Americans. And although I shall not be able to shew that *highly civilized*

that freedom of mind, which are necessary even for the exact *arrangement* of those materials which my early enthusiasm, and my early labour put me in possession of. But I have not relinquished the idea of publishing this work. On the contrary, I am still assiduous in collecting new materials, and hope to publish the whole in two or three years. Having greatly extended my original plan, I cannot flatter myself with the prospect of submitting my labours to the public much sooner than the period just mentioned.

* The recent date of the population of America has been warmly contended for by several writers. I could wish, that my excellent friend, the Reverend Dr. J. Belknap, had not leaned to this notion. See his *Dissertation on the Colour of the Native Americans, and the Recent Population of this Continent*. Boston: 1792. One of the most curious arguments that I have heard urged in favour of the late peopling of America, was that of the able professor Dugald Stewart, of Edinburgh. In his lectures, he spoke of the great uniformity in the figure and complexion of the native Americans. He imagined that climate, or situation, is the principal physical agent that varies the human form and complexion. But the Americans, from their uniform appearance, cannot, he said, long have inhabited the countries of America; so that the climates have not had time to produce their great effects. Without denying the immense influence of climate, &c. and believing, as I do, that the greater part of the Americans are *Asiatics*, I cannot help observing that those writers who suppose that there is but very little difference between the Americans, in different parts of this vast continent, are greatly mistaken. See what the Abbé Molina has said on this subject. “Rido fra me stesso, quando leggo in certi scrittori moderni riputati diligenti osservatori, che tutti gli Americani hanno un medesimo aspetto, e che quando se ne abbia veduto uno, si possa dire di avergli veduti tutti. Co’ desti autori si lasciarono troppo sedurre da certe vaghe apparenze di somiglianza procedenti per lo più dal colorito, le quali svaniscono tosto che si confrontano gl’individui di una nazione con quelli dell’altra. Un Chiese non si differenzia meno nell’aspetto da un Peruviano, che un’Italiano da un Tedesco. Io ho veduto pur dei Paraguaj, de’ Cujani, e dei Magellanic, i quali tutti hanno dei lineamenti peculiari, che li distinguono notabilmente gli uni dagli altri.” Sulla Storia Naturale del Chili. p. 336.

† Buffon, De Pauw, Raynal, and Robertson.

nations had ever possessed the countries of America, previously to the discovery of Columbus, yet it will be easy to demonstrate, that these countries were formerly possessed by nations much farther advanced in civilization, than the greater number of the nations north of the empire of Mexico: by nations who must have been extremely numerous.

I do not suppose that these more polished nations of America have entirely passed away. Some of them, it is probable, are extinguished. But of others, I suppose that it is chiefly the strength and the glory that are no more. Their descendants are still scattered over extensive portions of this continent, subsisting chiefly by fishing and by the chase; and contenting themselves with a slender and imperfect agriculture, such as is suited to the manners and the numbers of rude and uncultivated tribes.

In an inquiry into the history of the Americans, the mind, unbiassed by system, calm and deliberate in its research, cannot fail to discover unequivocal proofs of the ancient strength and respectability of the ancestors of many of the savage Indian tribes who now inhabit the countries of America. The limits of this letter will not permit me to exhibit a full view of the arguments which may be adduced in favour of this opinion. All that I shall attempt to do, is to mention some of the principal heads of proofs; and that in as concise a manner as I well can.

That many of the North-American tribes are the descendants of nations much more populous, and much more polished, than themselves, I infer from the following circumstances: viz.

First. From their traditions. According to these traditions, many Indian nations were much more numerous and improved in ancient times, than when the Europeans

first became acquainted with them. On this subject, there is much uniformity in these traditions. The Indians speak of the great power of their chiefs in those days of higher improvement, and assure us that wars* and pestilential diseases† were the great causes of their

* Mr. James Adair, speaking of the Indians, says, "Through the whole continent, and in the remotest woods, are traces of their ancient warlike disposition." *The History of the American Indians*, p. 377. London : 1775. The numerous fortifications, that have been already discovered, seem strongly to favour the idea, that the ancient nations of America were very warlike. From contemplating these fortifications, one is almost induced to say, what Florus has said of the Sarmatæ, "that they knew not what peace was." "Tanta barbaries est," says the Roman historian, "ut pacem non intelligant." L. Annaei Flori Epitome Rerum Romanarum. Lib. iv. cap. xii.

† I am inclined to think that fevers, probably contagious fevers, had contributed very greatly to the depopulation of the American nations, before the arrival of the Europeans among them. I could adduce many facts, from the early writers, which would give support to this supposition : but, at present, this is not necessary. The subject will be attended to in my memoir concerning the diseases and remedies of our Indians. In the meanwhile, I shall mention only one of the many writers, whom I have examined on this subject.

Daniel Gookin, in his *Historical Collections of the Indians in New-England*, speaking of the Pawkunnawkutts, who were once a populous nation in New-England, says, "This nation, a very great number of them, were swept away by an epidemical and unwonted sickness, An. 1612 and 1613, about seven or eight years before the English first arrived in those parts to settle the colony of New Plymouth. Thereby divine providence made way for the quiet and peaceable settlement of the English in those nations. What this disease was, that so generaily and mortally swept away, not only these but other Indians, their neighbours, I cannot well learn. Doubtless it was some pestilential disease. I have discoursed with some old Indians, that were then youths ; who say, that the bodies all over were exceeding yellow, describing it by a yellow garment they showed me, both before they died, and afterward." The same writer, speaking of the Massachusetts, says, "In An. 1612 and 1613, these people were also sorely smitten by the hand of God with the same disease, before mentioned in the last section : which destroyed the most of them, and made room for the English people of Massachusetts colony, which people this country, and the next called Pawtucketts. There are not of this people left at this day above three hundred men, besides women and children." See the valuable *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, for the year 1792*. Vol. I. p. 148. Gookin's "Epistle Dedicatory" is dated December 7th, 1674.

splitting into such numerous tribes, and of their scattered dispersion over this vast continent.

Secondly. Exclusively of a diminution in their numbers, many of the North-American tribes are much less polished and improved now than they were two hundred years since, when the Europeans first became acquainted with them. Declining in industry, they have neglected, if not forgotten, some of the arts by which they were distinguished. They are no longer studious to preserve the humble story of their country; the sublimest features of their religion, the acknowledgment of a great superintending spirit, or God, and of a place of future repose or happiness, are clouded in ignorance, and hardly known.* In short, we behold them rapidly passing to a melancholy decay, without our being able, in many instances, to determine to what causes their declension is owing.† Does not this *known* declension from a more

* In Adair's *History of the American Indians*, there is a greater collection of facts relative to the corruption or alteration of the religious notions and ceremonies of the Indians (particularly the Cheesake, Muskohge, Choktah, Chikkasah, and Katahba) than is to be found in any other work that I have ever met with. Adair had great opportunities of being acquainted with the Indians, and his work certainly contains many highly interesting facts. I believe him to have been a man of veracity; but, in the fulness of his enthusiasm for a system, he appears, in some instances, to have shaped and pared his facts to suit his purpose: he is, therefore, a guide who may mislead. Still his work ought to be read by every person who is curious of Indian matters. The following facts are well calculated to show the altered state of some of the American tribes. The *Busk*, or *green-corn-dance*, of the southern Indians, was originally a very solemn religious institution. But many Indians, who still attend at the busk, are entirely ignorant that it is an institution of a religious kind. Some of the Indian tribes, which are well remembered to have offered up sacrifices, offer them up no more. The Onondagoes have an annual sacrifice. The animal which they make choice of for this purpose is a large tortoise, and in defect of this a bear. An intelligent Indian, who gave me this information, confessed that he could not tell me, whether the sacrifice was made to the good or to the evil spirit. A little REVELATION would be of great use to such people as these.

† "The greatest part of the nations of Louisiana had formerly their temples as well as the Natchez, and in all these temples a perpetual fire is kept

respectable state of improvement, favour the opinion that, previously to our acquaintance with them, the Americans were both more numerous and cultivated than they have been at any subsequent period? For it is certain that *we* have not been the sole instruments concerned in their decline, and fall.

Thirdly. The mythology of many of the American tribes appears to be the remnant of the mythology of certain Asiatic nations, who are much farther advanced in civilization than any of the present Indian tribes of North-America.

Fourthly. The Mexicans are known to have made considerable progress in the science of astronomy. Among the rude nations of North-America, astronomical *principles* were not found. But among these nations, we have discovered certain small *fragments*, which appear to be parts of the Mexican system, or of the system of some people to whom astronomy, as a science, must have been known, however remote the period.

Fifthly. The structure of the languages of many American tribes is favourable to the idea, that these people were, formerly, much more improved than they are at present. Moreover, many of these languages are much more fertile than has been commonly supposed.

kept up. It should even seem, that the *Maubilians* enjoyed a sort of primacy in religion, over all the other nations in this part of Florida; for when any of their fires happened to be extinguished through chance, or negligence, it was necessary to kindle them again at theirs. But the temple of the Natchez is the only one subsisting at present (*viz.* in 1721), and is held in great veneration by all the savages inhabiting this vast continent, the decrease of whose numbers is as considerable, and has been still more sudden, than that of the people of Canada, without its being possible to assign the true reason of this event. Whole nations have entirely disappeared within the space of forty years at most; and those who still remain, are no more than the shadow of what they were, when M. De Sale discovered this country." *Journal of a Voyage to North-America.* By P. De Charlevoix, Vol. II. p. 273 and 274. English Translation. London: 1761.

The falsehoods or the errors of De Pauw, on this subject, are numerous.*

Connected with this subject, it may not be improper to observe, that the American nations appear to be remarkably retentive of their languages; I think more so than most other nations in their state of improvement.† Perhaps, this fact rather favours and strengthens the opinion which I am endeavouring to establish. In proportion to the original poverty of a language, will not that language be unstable? In proportion to its original fertility or extent, or in other words to the ancient improvement of those who speak it, will it not be less liable to change, more likely to preserve its genius and features?

Sixthly. It has been observed that among the Mexicans, a people much more polished than any of our present Indian tribes, the respect paid by inferiors to their superiors “was prescribed with such ceremonious accuracy, that it incorporated with the language, and influenced its genius and idiom. The Mexican tongue abounded in expressions of reverence and courtesy. The stile and appellations, used in the intercourse between equals, would have been so unbecoming in the mouth of one in a lower sphere, when he accosted a person in higher rank, as to be deemed an insult.”‡ The Mexicans were not alone in

* See *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Americains*, &c. Tome II. A Berlin: 1777.

† Mr. William Stith talks of “the Unstability and vast Mutability of the Indian Tongues,” &c. *The History of the first Discovery and Settlement of Virginia*. p. 13. Williamsburg: 1747. If Mr. Stith had been at the trouble of comparing the Indian languages of his day with those of the middle of the preceding century, he would not have made so precipitate an assertion.

‡ See Dr. Robertson’s *History of America*, Vol. III. p. 165. “It is, says Robertson, to P. Torribio de Benavente, that I am indebted for this curious observation. Palafox, bishop of Ciudad de la Puebla los Angeles, confirms and illustrates it more fully. The Mexican (says he) is the only language in which a termination indicating respect, *siuvas reverentiales y de cortesia*, may be affixed to every word. By adding the final syllable *zin* or *azin*.

this respect. The Natchez, who lived north of Mexico, had two languages; a language of the nobles, and a language of the common people.* Other North-American tribes, such as the Chippawas and Christianaw, make use of two languages. One of these, which is only spoken in the councils of the nation, is very different from the other, which is spoken out of the councils. I consider these facts as strong arguments in favour of my opinion.†

azin to any word, it becomes a proper expression of veneration in the mouth of an inferior. If, in speaking to an equal, the word Father is to be used, it is *Tall*, but an inferior says *Tatzin*. One priest speaking to another, calls him *Teopixque*; a person of inferior rank calls him *Teopixcatzin*. The name of the emperor who reigned when Cortes invaded Mexico, was *Montezuma*, but his vassals, from reverence, pronounced it *Montezumazin*. Torribio, MS. Palaf. Virtudes del Indio, p. 65. The Mexicans had not only reverential nouns, but reverential verbs. The manner in which these are formed from the verbs in common use, is explained by D. Jos. Aug. Aldama y Guevara in his Mexican Grammar, N^o 188." The History of America, Vol. III. note xxii. p. 368.

* "They (the Natchez) here two languages, that of the nobles and that of the people, and both are very copious. I will give two or three examples to shew the difference of these two languages. When I call one of the common people, I say to him *aquenán*, that is, *hark ye*: if, on the other hand, I want to speak to a Sun, or one of their nobles, I say to him, *magani*, which signifies, *hark ye*. If one of the common people call at my house, I say to him, *tachte—cabanañe*, are you there, or I am glad to see you, which is equivalent to our good-morrow. I express the same thing to a Sun by the word *apapagouaiché*. Again, according to their custom, I say to one of the common people, *petchi*, sit you down; but to a Sun, when I desire him to sit down, I say, *cabam*. The two languages are nearly the same in all other respects; for the difference of expression seems only to take place in matters relating to the persons of the Suns and nobles, in distinction from those of the people." *The History of Louisiana, or of the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina, &c.* By M. Le Page Du Pratz, p. 328. English Translation. London: 1774. From several circumstances, it appears very probable, that the Natchez were originally a part of the Mexican empire, and that they moved north-east, to the west and east sides of the Mississippi, after the arrival of Cortez in Mexico.—This once powerful, and (with respect, at least, to many of the surrounding nations) this cultivated, people is now no more. Their peculiar dialect (as far as we know) is lost. But, then, their hideous religion has also perished.

† Speaking of the peculiarity in the Mexican language, which I have just taken notice of, Dr. Robertson observes, "It is only in societies, which
time

Seventhly. I have already hinted, that the radical languages in North-America are but few. I know, indeed, that a very opposite opinion has been entertained by an enlightened American philosopher.† But the *dialects* of the American languages are very numerous. Thus there are, at least, forty dialects of the language of the Lennape, whom we call Delawares. Many of these dialects have receded so little from the parent stock, that we cannot hesitate to conclude, that the period is not very remote when the tribes who speak them were one and the same people. Moreover, within the period of two hundred and fifty years, we have seen one nation of Indians, from various causes, separating into several, and the same language splitting into dialects. This was the case with some of the southern nations, which are known to have migrated, from the west, across the Mississippi. These circumstances, by pointing out the great consolidation of the Americans, in former ages, strongly support my opinion, that they were once much more cultivated than we have ever known them: for extensive associations of men cannot be formed, or, at least, cannot long subsist, in the savage state.

time and the institution of regular government have moulded into form, that we find such an orderly arrangement of men into different ranks, and such nice attention paid to their various rights." *The History of America*, Vol. III. p. 165. Perhaps, this remark is not very *republican*, but it is, nevertheless, ingenious and just. Among the Natchez, the separation of ranks was well established; and it was once established among many other Indian tribes, where, at present, it is hardly known. I have already said (p. 189) that the Indians speak of the power of their chiefs in former times. This power of the chief even extended (in some instances) to the taking away the life of his subject, without the form of judgment, or trial. The chiefdom, at present, is seldom, if ever, hereditary. But that it was once hereditary among many of our tribes, is a fact well established by the testimony of several of the early writers concerning America.

† Mr. Jefferson. See his Notes on the State of Virginia, p. 164 and 165. London: 1787.

Eighthly. There are several reasons for believing, that the ancestors of some of the present races of Indians were acquainted with a kind of hieroglyphick-writing, very superior to the rude picture-writing now in use among them.* We discover the vestiges of such hieroglyphicks among the Mickmacks of Nova-Scotia, and among some other tribes. Moreover, we discover many proofs of the ancient existence of hieroglyphicks in various parts of North-America.† In the western parts of Virginia, I have examined a large stratum of rock, which is engraven with hundreds of hieroglyphicks.‡ They are, doubtless, very ancient; and must, I think, have been the work of a people acquainted with the use of iron instruments, or with hardened metallick instruments of some kinds. In examining the *China Illustrata* of the celebrated Athanasius Kircher, and the *Historico-*

* See a paper, by Sir William Johnson, in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society of London, Vol. LXIII. p. 143. also Bernard Romans's *Concise Natural History of East and West Florida*, &c. p. 102 and 103. New-York, 1776. On the subject of this picture-writing, the reader may consult La Hontan, Lafitau, and others, who have written on the subject of America.

† See, not to mention other writers, on this subject, Professor Kalm's *Travels into North America*, Vol. III. p. 123, 124, 125, 126, and 127. English Translation. London: 1770 and 1771.

‡ These inscriptions are engraven on a large stratum of rocks, on the south-east side of the River-Ohio, about two miles below the mouth of Indian or King's-Creek, which empties itself into the Ohio about fifty miles below Fort-Pitt. The greater part of the rocks lies nearly horizontally, and so near to the edge of the river, that at times the water entirely covers them. At the distance of a few yards, however, from the bank of the river, there are several large masses of the same species of rock, on which also I observed inscriptions: *these*, it is probable, have been formerly attached to the horizontal stratum, and have either been removed by the hand of man, or by some violent inundation of the river. It is, at least, certain, that the inscriptions upon both are of the same kind, and there can be little doubt that they have both been engraven at the same time.

The horizontal stratum of rocks extends, for a considerable distance, along the border of the Ohio: but, I cannot, with certainty, affirm how large a portion of it is engraven with the inscriptions, or marks.

Geographical Description of Strahlenberg, I have discovered that similar hieroglyphicks are found, both engraven and painted, upon rocks, in the northern parts of Asia. It was, partly at least, from a comparative view of these hieroglyphicks, that I was early led to believe that America has derived its inhabitants from Asia; an opinion which, I am persuaded, will acquire additional probability and strength, in proportion as we shall compare the physical appearances, the religions and mythology, and, above all, the languages of the Americans and northern Asiatics with each other.

That such hieroglyphicks were in use among the ancestors of our Indians, is rendered probable by another circumstance. Notwithstanding the authority of Kircher, and of Brianus Walton,* and the assertions of De Pauw,† it is certain, that the Mexicans, the Acolhuas, the Tlascalans, and other more improved nations of the Mexican empire, among other species of writing, were acquainted with that of hieroglyphicks.‡ This fact is attested by the learned Acofta, by Torquemada, by Gomara, by Solis, by Boturini, and by several other writers,§ who

* In his *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*, &c. Londini: 1657.

† *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Americains*, Tome II.

‡ See Clavigero's *History of Mexico*, Vol. II.

§ I have not had an opportunity of examining the works of Torquemada, Gomara, and Boturini; but what Acofta and Solis assert is decisive. "One of our company of Jesuites, a man very witty and well experienced, did assemble in the province of *Mexico*, the Antients of *Tescuco*, of *Talla*, and of *Mexico*, conferring at large with them, who shewed unto him their books, histories and kalenders, things very woorthy the sight, because they had their figures and hieroglyphicks, wherby they represented things in this manner: Such as had forme or figure, were represented by their proper images, and such as had not any, were represented by characters that signified them, and by this meanes they figured and writ what they would." *The Naturall and Morall Historie of the East and West Indies*, &c. lib. 6. chap. 7. p. 446. English Translation. London: 1604. Don Antonio De Solis, speaking of the Mexican paintings, says the same thing. To make their pictures "the more intelligible, they placed some Characters here and there, with which they seemed to explain, and give the Signification of the Picture.

This

were well acquainted with the Mexicans, or with their history, and whose authority, with candid inquirers, will, certainly, weigh much more than the invective *Recherches* of De Pauw, the eloquent puerilities of Buffon, or the weak systematic tissue of Robertson.

It would be easy, Sir, to adduce other proofs in favour of my position, that some of the present races of North-American Indians are the descendants of nations much more populous and polished than themselves. But the farther investigation of this curious subject is not necessary at present: I reserve the full discussion of it for my *Historical and Philosophical Inquiry*.

I have already said, that I suppose the articles which are the subject of my letter, were the work of the ancestors of some of the present races of Indians; of the same people who constructed the extensive earthen fortifications, large conical and other shaped mounds, and other ancient works, which are now found to be so numerous in many parts of our continent. At what period, or periods, these fortifications, &c. were constructed; at what periods they fell into ruins, and at what time the articles, which I am considering, were buried in the tumulus, in which they were found, are questions which I do not pretend to solve. Indeed, these are questions

This was their Manner of Writing; for they had not attained the Use of Letters, nor were they acquainted with those Signs or Elements, invented by other Nations, to represent Syllables, and make Words visible; but they explained themselves by their Pencils, marking down material Things with their own proper Images, and the rest with Numbers and significant Signs, disposed after such a Manner, that the Number, Sign, and Figure formed the Idea, and fully explained the Meaning; an excellent Invention (which shewed their Capacity), like the Hieroglyphicks of the Egyptians, who boasted of their Wit in that, which was common among the *Indians*, and which the *Mexicans* used with such Dexterity, that they had whole Books of this Kind of Characters, and legible Pictures, in which they preserved the Remembrance of their Antiquities, and left to Posterity the Annals of their Kings." *The History of the Conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards.* Book II. p. 73 and 74. English Translation. London: 1724.

which, it is probable, we shall never be able to solve. Time is continually dropping, before our eyes, veils which the hand can never remove. In the most interesting inquiries, whether historical, philosophical, or moral, how often are we obliged to pause, to meet the clouds before us ! Nor should we pause without reverence ; since we have numerous, and those the most impressive, reasons for supposing, that these clouds will be dispersed in a future, and an happier, state.

SECONDLY.

I AM now, Dear Sir, in the second place, to offer my opinions concerning the uses, or intentions, of the several articles, which are the subject of my letter. And here, I may observe, that although on this subject there may be some uncertainty, yet I think that the articles may, with propriety, be considered under the two heads of ornamental, and superstitious ; with the exception, perhaps, of the mica, or isinglass, and the lead-ore, of which I shall afterwards give my opinion.

I shall first speak of the articles which I take to be ornamental, and in the next place of those which I suppose to have been designed for some superstitious purposes.

The ornamental articles are those which Mr. Sargent has numbered fig. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 5, 7 7, 8, 9, and 10 10 (See the plates, with explanations). Of these articles it is not necessary that I should give any description, as this has already been done by Colonel Sargent, in the accompanying plate. I shall only observe, that the five stones (fig. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 5,) are each furnished with a groove, represented in the plate, by which groove, it is probable,

probable, they were appended to some part of the body of the deceased.

Perhaps, these stones were worn, or considered, as jewels by the person with whom they were buried. Acofta fays, that the places in which the dead among the Mexicans were buried, were their gardens, and the courts of their own houfes. Some of the dead bodies were carried to the places of facrifices, in the mountains. Others were burnt, and the afhes were buried in the temples. Along with the bodies, they buried all their apparel, precious ftones, and jewels. The afhes of thofe which were burnt were put into pots, together with the jewels, ftones, and ear-rings of the dead, however precious they might be.*

Although I have confidered thefe ftones as merely intended for ornamental purpofes, yet, it is not impoffible, that they may have been ufed for fuperftitious purpofes, like fome of the articles, which I am afterwards to take notice of. Acofta fays, the Mexicans had an idol which was much efteemed among them. This idol, which was their god of repentance, and of jubilees, and pardons for their fins, was called Tezcallipuca. It was made of a black, fhining ftone, and had ear-rings of gold and filver, and through the lower lip a *crystal*, half a foot in length. This crystal was hollow, and they fometimes put into it a green feather, and fometimes an azure one, which made the crystal, at one time, refemble an emerald, and, at another time, a turquois. At the neck, there hung a jewel, fo large that it covered all the ftomach: upon the arms, there were bracelets of gold, and at the navel a rich *green* ftone.†

Clavigero fays that among the Mexicans, “ emeralds were fo common, that no lord or noble wanted them, and none of them died without having one fixed to his

* Lib. 5. chap. 8. p. 348. Englifh Tranflation.

† Lib. 5. chap. 9. p. 353.

lip, that it might serve him, as they imagined, instead of a heart."*

The copper articles (fig. 9, and 10 10,) deserve particular attention. I have said, I suppose that they were ornamental.

It has long been known, that some of the American nations manufactured copper into certain articles, or utensils. Acosta expressly informs us that the Indians (he means the Mexicans and the Peruvians) used copper for their arms.† It would appear, from this learned writer, that after the arrival of the Spaniards in America, the practice of employing copper fell into a kind of disuse. The Indians busied themselves in searching for the more precious metals.‡ It does not appear that the Americans ever employed copper as a medium of commerce.

The Mexicans and the Peruvians were acquainted with the art of hardening copper, so as to render it a substitute for iron.

I am not ignorant that one of the ablest antiquaries of the present century has ventured to suppose, that the art of hardening copper was not known to the Americans with whom the Spaniards became acquainted in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Count de Caylus, the gentleman to whom I allude, imagined that the copper hatchet, which he examined, was the work of a people more ancient than the Incas, and that they inhabited the countries of Peru a long time before this race of monarchs. The angry Mr. De Pauw, who is continually differing from almost every other writer, and who is eternally committing mistakes, and hazarding false and feeble speculations, treats this opinion of Caylus with contempt.§ If, however, the Berlin philosopher had re-

* The History of Mexico. Vol. I. p. 422.

† Lib. iv. chap. 3. p. 209 and 210.

‡ Ibid.

§ Recherches Philosophiques sur les Americains, Tome II.

flected as much as he appears to have read, the opinion of the French antiquary would have demanded more of his attention. He would have seen reasons to conclude, that long before the foundation of the Peruvian monarchy, under the guidance of Manco Capac and his consort Mama Ocollo, the countries of Peru had been inhabited by a race of people, who were probably more polished than the Peruvians themselves. Among these people, it is not improbable that the use of hardened copper was known: but to deny that it was also known to the Mexicans, and to the Peruvians, would be to dispute the veracity of some of the most respectable and learned men who have written on the subject of the Americans. Such are Columbus himself, Acofta, Solis, Don Ulloa, Mr. Condamine, and others.*

Hitherto, very few facts have been discovered to prove the existence of copper implements among any of the nations of the higher latitudes of North-America; and none have been discovered that *unequivocally* prove the existence of the art of hardening copper among these nations. But as my inquiries have led me to believe, that the ancient inhabitants of North-America were as polished as the nations of South-America, so I cannot well entertain a doubt, that copper instruments were in use among the northern Americans, and that these latter, as well as the former, understood the art of hardening this metal. This opinion is rendered more probable, when it is remembered that one of the most polished nations of America, I mean the Mexicans, migrated from certain countries situated north of the Vermillion-Sea; and that in the progress of their migration these tribes moved far to-

* The art of hardening copper was known to the Greeks, and to the Romans. It is said to have been preserved until the taking of Constantinople. See *Art des Sièges*, par M. Joly de Maizeroy, p. 4. 1778.

wards the east.* The Mexicans, a number of circumstances have induced me to believe, were the ancestors of the nations known by the name of Choktah, Chikkafah, &c.

When Fernando de Soto was at Quaxule in Florida, he was told that "Northwards he would find the Province of *Chisca*, where they melted Copper, and another metal of the same colour, but much more lively and perfect; that it was a metal that seemed to be more precious than Copper, but yet was not made use of, because it was softer. This relation, continues my author, agreed with what *Soto* was told in *Cutifachiqui*, where we saw some little Axes of Copper, which they said was mingled with Gold."†

The Peruvian historian, Garcillasso de la Vega, also takes particular notice of certain metals, which the Spaniards found at Cofaciqui. From the account of this historian (who, I am very sorry to say, is not in every instance to be confided in), it would seem that the Floridians were acquainted with both copper and tin, with which metals, when united, they may have formed their axes. La Vega, as well as the Portuguese author, expressly mentions copper; and it is not unlikely (admitting the truth of the story) that the white metal was tin. It is said to have been very light.‡

* See Clavigero's History of Mexico. Vol. I. p. 115 and 116.

† A Relation of the Invasion and Conquest of Florida by the Spaniards, under the command of Fernando de Soto. Written in Portuguese by a gentleman of the town of Elvas. English Translation: p. 75. London: 1686.

‡ I have not an opportunity of consulting the original work in Spanish. My information is derived from Richelet's French Translation, which was published at Leyden, in the year 1731. See *Histoire de la conquête de la Floride: ou Relation de ce qui s'est passé dans la découverte de ce Pays par Ferdinand de Soto*. I shall quote as much of this work as relates immediately to my subject. "Durant les courses d' *Aniasco*, les autres *Espagnols* qui espéraient tous de faire fortune en *Cofaciqui*, s'informerent avec soin des richesses qui s'y rencontroient, & le General commanda d'appeller les deux jeunes
Indiens

The Baron Lahontan, though, in some respects, a credulous writer, may also be adduced as an authority in favour of the use of copper articles among some of the North-American tribes. This enterprising traveller was informed, that the Mozeemlek-nation of Indians, residing far west of the Mississippi, “made Stuffs, Copper Axes, and several other Manufactures.” The baron even saw in the possession of a Mozeemlek-slave “a reddish sort of a Copper Medal hanging upon his Neck.” He says he “had it melted by Mr. *de Pont*’s Gun-smith, who understood something of Metals; but it became thereupon heavier, and deeper coloured, and withal somewhat tractable. I desired the Slaves to give me a circumstantial Account of these Medals; and accordingly they gave me to understand, that they are made by the *Takuglauk*, who are excellent Artizans, and put a great Value upon such Medals.”*

Among the articles which were found in the tumulus, there was a quantity of isinglass, or mica membranacea. It is not easy to ascertain with what view this substance, so common in many parts of North-America, was thought worthy of a place in the tumulus, with the body of the deceased. I cannot learn that this mica is held in superstitious esteem by any of the present Indians of

Indiens que l'on avoit amenez d' Apalaché. Il les envoya vers la Dame de Cofaciqui, la supplier de faire apporter des perles avec de ces métaux blancs & jaunes, dont trafiquoient les Marchands qu' ils avoient servis; l'asseurant que si elle obligeoit les Espagnols en cela, elle acheveroit de les combler de ses graces. Cette Dame dépêcha aussi-tôt de ses sujets querir de ce métal; & ils rapporterent du cuivre d' une couleur tres-dorée, avec de certains aïx blancs, comme de l' argent, longs & larges d' une aune, épais de trois à quatre doigts, & toutefois tres-legers. Mais quand on les manioit ils se reduisoient en poudre, à la façon d' une motte de terre fort sèche.——Ils (the Spaniards) se réjouirent aussi de voir que plusieurs croioient qu' il y eût de l' or dans le cuivre; mais comme ils n' avoient ni eau forte, ni pierre de touche, ils n' en purent faire l' essai.” Histoire, &c. Tome I. Liv. IV. chap. xiv. p. 270 and 271.

* New Voyages to North-America. Vol. I. p. 125 and 126. London: 1735.
our

our continent, nor do I learn that it is ever used by them. But there are some reasons for believing that formerly it was an article of use, or of superstitious regard, among the ancestors of the present Indians. My much-lamented friend, Major Jonathan Heart, who was killed in the defeat of General St. Clair's army, on the 4th of November 1791, informs us, that "a quantity of ising-glass" was found on the breast of a skeleton in one of the tumuli, among the great ancient works, near the junction of the rivers Ohio and Muskingum.* The Abbé Clavigero says, that "little looking-glasses of the stone Itztli," together with earthen pots, jars, &c, were found among the great ancient works, called *Café-grandi*, in California. This itztli was nothing more than the mica membranacea; and the works, just mentioned, are said to have been built by the Mexicans, in their peregrination towards the south.†

Among the Mexicans, no stone was more common than the itztli, "of which, according to Clavigero, there is great abundance in many places of Mexico.‡" The Mexicans applied the itztli to various useful, and to some superstitious, purposes. Of this fossil they made "beautiful looking-glasses set with gold, and those extremely sharp razors which they fixed in their swords, and which their barbers made use of. They made those razors with such expedition, that in the space of one hour an artificer could finish more than a hundred."§ They also made lancets for bleeding of the itztli,|| knives, and spears. "After the introduction of the gospel they made sacred stones of it which were much valued."¶

* See the *Columbian Magazine*, or *Monthly Miscellany*, for May, 1787.

P. 427.

† The *History of Mexico*. Vol. I. p. 114 and 115.

‡ *Ibidem*, Vol. I. p. 17.

§ *Ibid.* p. 421.

|| *Ibid.* p. 428.

¶ *Ibid.* p. 17.

Perhaps,

Perhaps, the figures of children and birds, which were found in the tombs of Florida, by Soto, were made of the mica, or itztli. It is true, they are said to have been made of "pearl."

Colonel Sargent says that "a few pounds of very rich lead-ore were found in the grave," along with the other articles. It is probable, that this ore was buried with the person, merely as a part of his property.

THE articles which I suppose to have been designed for superstitious purposes, are the representation of a bird's head and beak, and the bone engraven with hieroglyphicks, or marks.

I shall first speak of the bird's head. It is highly probable, that this is only part of an idol, or image, which belonged to the person whose bones were found, along with the articles, in the tumulus. But this is only a conjecture.

I am not able to ascertain what bird this idol was designed to represent. Perhaps, it is not the actual representation of any existent bird, but a mere creation of fancy. I am inclined, however, to think that it is the likeness of some real species, though I am sensible that the imagination often paints new forms, and in particular that such forms are painted by the minds of individuals, or of nations, when clouded by superstition. From what will afterwards be said, it will not seem altogether unlikely, that the bird's head is part of an image, the body of which may have been the representation of a man, or of some other animal, and not of a bird.

There are several reasons for supposing, that this bird's head was an idol, and of course designed for some superstitious purposes. I cannot discover with what intention it was formed, and buried with the deceased in the tumu-

lus, without admitting that it had some reference to the religious notions of the deceased. I know that several species of birds are objects of superstitious veneration, or regard, among many of the present races of North-American Indians; and I learn from Acofta and other writers, that some of the Mexican idols had bird's heads.

I have said that many of the Indians have a superstitious regard or veneration for certain species of birds. It may not be improper to take notice of some of these birds.

Among the Lennape, or Delawares, the owl is held in particular veneration, or regard. "I have frequently (says Mr. John Heckewelder*) been with them in the woods at night. When the owls have set up a noise, they, or one of the company, would immediately rise up, and strew some tobacco in the fire. Upon inquiry, I was told, that these were a guard over them by night, for they gave them warning, whenever an enemy approached, or was about to surround them, especially when at war."†

* M. S. *penes me.*

† The following passage is so curious, as connected with my subject, that I shall give it, at length, in the words of Strahlenberg. "There are (says this industrious author, whose work Mr. Pinkerton is pleased to call "a prolix and weak work") a Sort of Owls in *Siberia*, not far from *Crasnoyahr*, which are as white as Snow, and as large as Hen-Turkeys; the *Russians* call them *Lün*, and *Uiün*; the *Tartars*, *Ackia* and *Acky*; and the *Kalmucks* name them *Zagan Schub*, and also *Zagan Gorochun*. The latter hold them sacred, and suffer no-body to shoot them. I never asked them the Reason of it; but, I find, in *Hübner's Political History of Tartary*, in an Extract of the Life and Actions of *Cingis-Chan*, Founder of the Monarchy of the *Mungal* and *Kalmuck Tartars*, the following Account: it happened that he, and his small Army, were surprized, and put to Flight, by his Enemies; and seeking to conceal himself in a small Coppice, where he might very easily have been discovered by the Enemy, an *Owl*, which is a very shy Bird, settled upon one of the Bushes, which made his Pursuers desist from looking for him there, not thinking any Man could be hid where this Bird would stay: this gave *Cingis-Chan*, an Opportunity of making his Escape by the Favour of the Night. And seeing the Preservation of his Life was entirely owing to the *Owl*, this Bird was, from that Time, looked upon so sacred, that every one of them wore a Plume of *Owl's* Feathers on his Head. Now since in these Parts, there are white

The young priests, among the Creek-Indians, generally carry a stuffed owl about them. It is the badge of their profession.

Mr. Beverley speaks of a small bird, which was held in great regard by some of the Indians of Virginia. "They say, this is the Soul of one of their Princes; and on that score, they would not hurt it for the World. But there was once a profane *Indian* in the upper Parts of *James River*, who, after Abundance of Fears and Scruples, was at last brib'd to kill one of them with his Gun; but the *Indians* say, he paid dear for his Presumption, for in a few Days after he was taken away, and never more heard of."*

white *Owls* which are revered by the People, that historical Passage seems to carry along with it the Face of Truth. For this is certain, that the *Kalmucks*, when they celebrate any great Festival, always wear coloured *Owl's* Feathers in their Caps, and the *Wogulitzzi* have, among other Idols, a wooden *Owl*, to which they fasten the Legs of a natural One." An Historico-Geographical Description of the north and eastern parts of Europe and Asia, &c. p. 434 and 435. London: 1738.

* From another circumstance mentioned by Beverley, it is evident that the above bird must have been greatly esteemed by the Indians. "They (the Indians), says this faithful writer, erect Altars where-ever they have any remarkable occasion; and because their principal Devotion consists in Sacrifice, they have a profound Respect for these Altars. They have one particular Altar, to which, for some mystical Reason, many of their Nations pay an extraordinary Veneration;" of this sort was a crystal cube, which the Indians called *Pawcorance*, "from whence proceeds the great Reverence they have for a small Bird that uses the Woods, and in their Note continually sound that name. This Bird flies alone, and is only heard in the Twilight." *The History of Virginia, in Four Parts.* p. 184 and 185. London: 1722. I take the bird here spoken of to be the *Caprimulgus virginianus* of Gmelin, the Long-winged-Goatsucker of Pennant. This bird, which is very common in different parts of North-America, is best known by the name of *Whip-poor-Will*, from the supposed resemblance of one of its notes to these words. It is the *Wee con lis* of the Delaware-Indians. Long before I knew that this bird was peculiarly regarded by any of our Indians, I used something like the following words, in some manuscript communications, which I made to my friend Mr. Pennant. "There is something so melancholy, and so truly solemn, in the evening call of the *Caprimulgus*, that I should not be surpris'd to find that this bird is an object of religious veneration, or regard, with some of our Indians, who are among the number of the most superstitious nations of mankind."

The late Captain Carver mentions a bird, called the Wakon-bird, which is held in particular esteem by some of the north-west Indians of our continent. They say,

Mr. Clayton, in a letter to Mr. Catesby, says, "The *Indians* say these Birds were never known till a great massacre was made of their country folks by the *English*, and that they are the souls or departed spirits of the massacred *Indians*. Abundance of people here (in Virginia) look upon them as Birds of ill omen, and are very melancholy if one of them happens to light upon their house, or near their door, and set up his cry (as they will sometimes upon the very threshold); for they verily believe one of the family will die very soon after." *The Natural History of Carolina, &c.* Vol. II. p. 116. London: 1771. In this place, I take an opportunity of correcting an error into which I think my friend Mr. Pennant has fallen, on the subject of our Caprimulgus. After giving a good description of the Short-winged Goat-sucker, as he calls it (the Caprimulgus carolinensis of Gmelin), this excellent writer says, "I received this species from Doctor GARDEN of *Charlestown, South Carolina*, where it is called, from one of its notes, *Chuck, Chuck Will's widow*; and in the northern provinces, *Whip-poor-Will*, from the resemblance which another of its notes bears to those words." *Arctic Zoology*. Vol. II. p. 133. London: 1792. But I believe, it is certain that the Chuck-Will's widow and the Whip-poor-Will are two distinct species of Caprimulgus. Their notes, or cries, are very different, as are also their places of residence during the season of incubation, which is the only time they sing. The Chuck-Will's widow dwells only near the sea-coast, and I believe not so far north as the Bay of Chesapeake. Mr. William Bartram informs me, that he never heard this bird farther north than Cape-Fear-River, in North-Carolina. It is seldom met with more than fifty miles from the sea-coast in Carolina and Florida, where they are almost constantly heard from evening to break of day. But the Night-Hawk, or Whip-poor-Will, dwells only in the high, hilly, or mountainous countries of West-Florida, Georgia, the two Carolinas, and Virginia; though north of Virginia, it extends even to the sea-coast as far as Canada, and according to Mr. Pennant even still farther north. In these countries, the note of this bird is Whip-poor-Will, during the evening, and moon-light nights until day-break. "I have (says Mr. W. Bartram, *M. S. penes me*) heard this bird for a night or two, in the spring, in Carolina, on the sea-coast, when they were on their journey northward; and they are there in abundance, in the autumn, flying and darting about in the air, on their return southerly to pass the winter; and then they are called Night-Hawks, and are supposed by most people to be a distinct species from the Whip-poor-Will, and the Chuck Will's widow." Mr. Pennant is not alone in the mistake which I have mentioned. A very ingenious friend of mine observed to me, that it was curious that climate should so essentially alter the note of a bird, for, he said, about the latitude of Cape-Fear, the Whip-poor-Will uttered quite a different cry from what it does in the northern states. I have explained the error. The Reverend Mr. Morse (*American Universal Geography*,

it is the bird of the Great-Spirit. The Naudowessie-Indians, our author informs us, “seemed to treat them as if they were of a superior rank to any other of the feathered race.”* There can be little doubt that the Wakon-bird is the very same bird which Brisson has figured and described under the name of *Le Tyran a queue fourchue*, or *Tyrannus cauda bifurca*.† It is the *Muscicapa Tyrannus* of Linnæus,‡ and the Fork-tail-Fly-catcher of Pennant.§

Mr. Roger Williams, in his curious work, entitled *A Key into the Language of America*, speaking of the crow, says, “These birds, although they do the corn some hurt, yet scarce will one native amongst an hundred kill them; because they have a tradition, that the crow brought them at first an Indian grain of corn in one ear, and an Indian or French bean in another, from the great God Cawtantowwit’s field in the south-west, from whence they hold came all their corn and beans.”

“Though with all the Indian nations, says Adair, the raven is deemed an impure bird, yet they have a kind of sacred regard to it, whether from the traditional knowledge of Noah’s employing it while he was in the ark, or from that bird having fed Elijah in the wilderness (as some suppose) cannot be determined; however with our supposed red Hebrews the name points out an indefatiga-

Geography, &c. Part I. p. 192. Boston: 1793) says, “Bartram considers the whip-poor-will and the night-hawk as the same bird (*Caprimulgus Americanus*) but they are well known to be different birds.” Mr. Morse, however, and not Mr. Bartram, is mistaken.

* Three years Travels through the interior parts of North-America, &c. p. 244 and 245. Philadelphia: 1792.

† Ornithologia, &c. Vol. II. p. 395, 396, 397 and 398. Paris: 1760.

‡ *Systema Naturæ*.

§ *Arctic Zoology*. Vol. II. p. 76.

|| See Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, for the year 1794. Vol. III. p. 219.

ble, keen, successful warrior.”* The same author tells us, that when the Indian physicians, or priests, visit their patients “they invoke the raven, and mimichis croaking voice.”† Mr. Pennant, on the authority of Mr. Hutchins, informs us that the “northern *Indians*, on the contrary, detest this and all the Crow kind.”‡

The very faithful Portuguese author, whom I have already quoted, informs us, that when Fernando de Soto was at Cutifachiqui in Florida, in the year 1540, the female cazique of the place having observed the unlimited appetite of the Spaniards for pearls, “she bid the Governor (Soto) send and search in some Tombs that were in her Town, telling him that he would find abundance there; and that if he caused those also of the other Villages to be searched, they would furnish Pearls enough to load all the horses of the Army. The Tombs of the Town, continues our author, were indeed searched, where we got fourteen buthels of Pearls; and the figures of Children and Birds made also of Pearl.”§

I have said that some of the Mexican idols were furnished with bird’s heads. I shall now mention some of these idols.

In Cholula, the miserable inhabitants worshipped an idol, which was the god of trade or merchandize, the people of this commonwealth being much given to traffick. This idol was called Quetzhaalcoalt. It was placed very high in a temple. It had about it gold, silver, jewels, very rich feathers, and habits of various colours. It had the form of a man, but the visage of a little bird, with a red bill, and above a comb full of warts, having ranks of teeth, and the tongue hanging out. Acosta, who is my

* The History of the American Indians, p. 194.

† Ibid. p. 173.

‡ Arctic Zoology. Vol. I. p. 287.

§ A Relation of the Invasion and Conquest of Florida, &c. p. 64 and 65.

authority on this head, has given a more particular description of this god of merchandize.*

It may not be improper to mention, in this place, that earthen mounds, or pyramids, similar to many of those which are found in various parts of our western-country, are still to be seen in the neighbourhood of Cholula, and are supposed by Torquemada, and by Clavigero,† to have been erected by the Toltecas.

The principal idol of Mexico was called Vitziliputzli. It was an image cut out of wood, in the form of a man, set upon an azure-coloured stool. Upon its head, it had a rich plume of feathers, like the beak of a small bird.‡

“ In a high mountain of Achiauhtla, in Mizteca, Benedict Fernandez, a celebrated Dominican missionary, found a little idol called by the Miztecas the *heart of the people*. It was a very precious emerald, four inches long and two inches broad, upon which was engraved the figure of a bird, and round it that of a little snake. The Spaniards offered fifteen hundred sequins for it; but the zealous missionary before all the people, and with great solemnity reduced it to powder.”§

The sculptured bone is one of the most curious of all the articles that were found in the tumulus. I have already said, that I suppose it was intended for some superstitious purpose. I am unwilling to hazard any farther conjectures concerning it, except this one, viz. that I conceive the marks to be significant hieroglyphicks. It is not an human bone.

The ancient inhabitants of Iceland used to write upon the bones of fish, and other animals.

Colonel Sargent, in his letter to me, has mentioned the mouldered condition of the bones which were found

* Lib. 5. chap. 9. p. 354.

† The History of Mexico. Vol. I. p. 267 and 268.

‡ See Acosta's Natural and Morall Historie. Lib. 5. chap. 9. p. 352.

§ See Clavigero's History of Mexico. Vol. I. p. 259.

in the tumulus. I have had, however, an opportunity of examining a piece of the thigh-bone, and also a piece of the tibia, or principal bone of the leg. They bespeak a body of the common size. I mention this last circumstance, because it has often been asserted, that gigantic *human* bones have been found in America. Some of the authors of these assertions are deservedly esteemed for their writings.* There is, certainly, no physical impossibility in the existence of a race of giants. On the contrary, the general scheme of nature, with respect to the creation of the species of animals and vegetables, would lead us to expect a species of giants belonging to the human kind. At any rate, the existence of giants is not a more improbable circumstance than the existence of certain small races, such as the Laplanders, who are well known to us. As far, however, as my inquiries have extended, all the human bones that have been found in our ancient tumuli, &c. are bones of the common size.



It is a mortifying circumstance, that in proportion as we extend our acquaintance with the features or manners of rude nations, we are collecting materials for an history of human superstitions, and of mental miseries. If, in the progress of our researches, we discover that in-

* Such are Hernandez, Acosta, and Clavigero. The last of these writers mentions large bones being found in "tombs" in Mexico, and considers this circumstance as a proof that they were human bones. *The History of Mexico*. Vol. I. p. 84. But this cannot be considered as a decided proof. Did not the Egyptians carefully embalm and bury the bodies of the Ibis? The animal to which the large bones mentioned by Clavigero belonged, may have been (like the Ibis with the Egyptians) an object of veneration among the ancient Americans; or they may have been entombed from the supposition that they were human bones. It is known, that the bones of the Hippopotamus were "shewn in several cities of Greece for the bones of giants." See that curious book, *The Life of Sethos*. Vol. I. p. 73. London: 1732

stinct, reason, the light of nature, has taught to these nations the existence of some great, superintending being, the source of life and good: if we discover among them the unequivocal acknowledgment of a future state of existence, in which the warrior and the hunter, and the virtuous of either sex, are thought to repose from all their cares, and to taste, in fulness, unmixed physical pleasures (the savage mind asks no more), still we discover them under the pressure of that superstitious fabric, which is founded upon the innumerable follies and weaknesses of men. In the midst of the gloom, with which the contemplation of such an abject state of the species is too well calculated to over-cloud the mind of sensibility, we derive much consolation from the reflection, that *all* nations are capable of improvement; and that in the general order of nature, there seems to be nothing to prevent the establishment of a more just religion over the surface of the earth: a religion more just, because it teaches us the relations of God to the universe; the relations of man to God; and the relations of men to each other.

In the range of human improvement, there is a singular point, marked by the hideous superstition of the people. The state of society to which I allude is that in which the Mexicans were discovered, and in which, at a later period, we have known the Natchez, and the people of Bogota. The Mexicans, there can no longer be any doubt, were acquainted with many of those arts which we have ever been accustomed to consider as the arts of a civilized people. Their astronomy, their police, their form of government, in several respects so similar to that of the United-States, would seem to entitle them to a place among nations considerably civilized. In all these respects, they were superior to most of the nations around them: they were greatly superior to any of the Indian tribes now known to us. This higher degree of cultivation,

however, did not secure the Mexicans from the errors and the miseries of superstition. On the contrary, they were among the number of the most superstitious nations of mankind, and their innumerable human sacrifices constitute one of the blackest features in the character of our species. I have been led, in the course of the present and of preceding inquiries, to suppose, that the ancient American remains are the work of a people nearly in the same state of society as the Mexicans; of a people who, like the Mexicans, were extremely superstitious. If this conjecture be well founded, we ought not to regret that the present races of Indians have declined from the superior polish of their fore-fathers. We have reason to rejoice, that they have thus declined; since, if they have lost some of the arts by which they were distinguished, they have also lost some of the worst parts of their religion. In the fulness of their gratitude to the Great-Spirit, they at present content themselves with offering up the fruits, the grains, and the flowers of their country: or if, for religious purposes, they deem it necessary to deprive existences of life, they do not make sacrifices of human beings, but offer up some of the wild or domesticated animals around them. The annual offering of some of our southern tribes is the earliest ripened maize of their country: but the ancestors of these very tribes are known to have made, at the same period, offerings of their children.

Avarice, or the desires for gain, sometimes stimulates men to exertions, which prove beneficial to literature, or to the sciences. It will be well if this detestable passion can, at any time, be turned to the better interests of men. In this country, as yet, the energies of science are not great. The history of the aboriginal Americans, in particular, has been neglected; considerable tribes have mouldered away, and of their physical and moral features,
of

of their traditions, and languages, we hardly know any thing that is entitled to the name of certainty. But, with respect to all these subjects, much may still be done, and something may be done where we have least expected it. Let us open the tombs of the ancient Americans. In these dark abodes, the last asylums of man on this globe, we may discover materials that will enable us to throw some light upon the ancient history of the Americans. If we are not sufficiently animated by the love of science, let us remember, that in the tombs of the Mexicans and Peruvians, the Spaniards have discovered treasures of gold, of silver, and of precious stones; and that even in the tombs in Florida, valuable pearls are said to have been found. I think, there can be little doubt that the opening of the North-American tumuli will reward the labourers with valuable spoils.

I have taken up a good deal of your time; more than I contemplated when I undertook to give you my sentiments on the subject of the tumular articles. I have been extremely desirous to afford you some amusement, and, if possible, some information.

I am, with the greatest respect,

Reverend and Dear Sir,

Your Humble and Obedient Servant,

And Affectionate Friend,

BENJAMIN SMITH BARTON.

To the Rev. Dr. Joseph Priestley.